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SUBJECT: GoSS Avian Influenza Response Still Slow,
but Coming with International Support

REF: Khartoum 02203

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) continues to demonstrate a lack of urgency, coordination, and capacity in dealing with the Juba avian influence (AI) H5N1 outbreak in poultry. One AI task force meeting has been held, led by the Ministry of Animal Resources and Fisheries (MARF), and another meeting is scheduled for a week later. The Ministry of Health (MOH) has yet to take a lead role in addressing potential human health risks. There is no evidence of any human infections, but no human surveillance is in place. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and USAID in-country resources are coordinating with MARF and MOH on community surveys on the extent of the outbreak and a public information campaign. Additional USG assistance is expected this week. FAO has been weak in coordinating with GOSS, other UN entities and international donors. End summary.

GoSS Avian Flu Task Force Meeting Held, Finally

¶2. (SBU) The long awaited GoSS AI task force meeting was held September 15 with no substantial participation at ministerial or under secretary level by MARF or MOH. Both MARF and MOH under secretaries attended briefly and left before discussion of an action

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plan. MOH has yet to dedicate any staff to the AI task force. Key AI task force participants included:

- Dr. Agol Malak Kwal (chair), MARF director general;
- Dr. Lul Riek, acting focal point for MOH (he is in Southern Sudan on a USAID-funded diaspora return program to address HIV/AIDS issues);
- Dr. M. Yongolo, FAO (a consultant);
- Dr. Thomas Boo, CDC, Nairobi rep.;
- USG, European Joint Donor Office and EU agriculture reps;
- UNICEF health officer; and
- WHO and UN OCHA (brief attendance by both at staff level)

¶3. (SBU) The task force succeeded in establishing some interagency cooperation among the participants, but no central incident command structure was established. MARF DG agreed to the concept of a coordinated command center, and USG participants expressed willingness to help with implementation, including identifying work space and communications equipment.

GoSS to Ban Bird Movement, Cull Poultry, Surveil

¶4. (SBU) MARF reported plans to ban movement of birds from Juba, depopulate Juba town poultry, and initiate surveillance. MARF also announced proposed plans to begin culling with compensation, but no decision has been made yet on such actions. (Note: CDC doubts the immediate feasibility of depopulation and a movement ban due to lack of any functional mechanism. End note.)

¶5. (SBU) FAO has begun to lead an effort to obtain additional lab specimens. On September 17, state MOH officials and Drs. Mugo Muita and Diane Gross undertook a pilot household survey of about 60 homes to collect data on the frequency of backyard poultry keeping, as well as recent animal and human illnesses. While the full survey data is being compiled, preliminary assessments reveal some bird deaths over the last few months, although causes are uncertain, and there have been no related human illnesses so far identified. MARF is open to additional USG assistance and CDC and USAID reps are assessing technical, logistical, and material support needs.

Public Information Campaign Commences

¶6. (SBU) Public information is a key area of concern, which CDC and GoSS officials are attempting to address. In the short term, GoSS AI task force has approved short radio public announcements in both English and Juba Arabic and loudspeaker dissemination in Juba town warning of the disease in poultry and directing the public to report and dispose properly of any suspected animals. There is no corresponding human illness information campaign, nor any coordination with health workers. We anticipate that USAID and UNICEF will begin to increase efforts to address this gap shortly. A USAID-funded AI communications expert is expected to arrive in Juba on September 18-19 to facilitate a more coordinated public information campaign with the GOSS, UN and other members of international community.

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¶7. (SBU) CG Juba will raise the issue with senior GOSS officials during calls to be made the week of September 18 to press for rapid response, dedicated MARF and MOH staff, and identification of needs for coordinated international assistance. USAID will be sending Dr. Martin Swaka, a health specialist in Khartoum, to serve as the point of contact for ConGen assistance and coordination with GOSS on AI response.

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